



## TOWN OF NEEDHAM

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TO: Board of Selectmen  
FROM: **Kate Fitzpatrick**  
CC: Chris Coleman, Dave Davison  
DATE: September 9, 2008  
RE: Town Hall Options

After reviewing all of the proposals developed by McGinley, Kalsow & Associates, considering input received from Town Meeting Members, participants at the Town Hall Summit, members of the public, and the Town Hall Study Committee, and reviewing potential impact on future capital improvement projects identified in the accompanying financial analysis, I recommend that the Board of Selectmen endorse and seek Town Meeting approval of Alternative 4.

This recommendation is based on the following factors:

Flexibility – Alternative 4 provides the community with the greatest flexibility for responding to changing needs in the future. A modest investment today (estimated at approximately \$2.8 million) will allow for expansion or reorganization in the future without the cost of constructing an addition, or significant retrofitting of building systems. Such program expansion or reorganization can thus be achieved in a timelier manner.

Operational Efficiency – Alternative 4 is operationally more efficient than Alternative 1. All of the primary transactional offices are located on the first floor, making the layout more customer-friendly. The departments with high public interaction are on the first and second floors, and all departments remain co-located in the center of Town (with the exception of Planning and Park and Recreation which were proposed to be relocated under Alternative 1 as well). Finally, offices are designed without use of partial height partitions which, while workable, presented some logistical challenges from an operational perspective.

Meeting Spaces – Given its decentralized, largely volunteer government, the Town's principal space need, other than centrally located Town offices, is for small and medium-sized meeting spaces. In past years, three or more committees could simultaneously meet at Town Hall. Board members, staff and interested parties could move from meeting to meeting as needed, a great help when committees were working on related matters. Alternative 4 allows for at least five public meetings to be conducted simultaneously – a more effective means for boards and committees to meet jointly on related matters, a more efficient use of staff resources, and a convenience for the public. The large

number of small meeting spaces also meets a critical shortage for conference space during the workday.

Historic Features – Alternative 4 preserves the historic features of the Town Hall. The exterior view of the Town Hall under Alternative 4 will be more aesthetically pleasing than Alternative 1. This is an important factor since the vast majority of residents experience the Town Hall from the exterior.

Public Assembly Hall – Alternative 4 allows for the restoration of a public assembly hall in the Town Hall. I do not recommend that the Board endorse Alternative 4 in order to create a performance venue, as has been proposed, but rather as a place of assembly primarily dedicated to civic use consistent with the function of the Town Hall as the principal place of business of the municipal corporation. The hall will likely be used on an intermittent basis for Town operations, such as flu clinics, training sessions, large-scale public hearings, and community workshops. Other civic uses contemplated include New Year's Needham events, art shows, certain tercentennial events, and Public Library functions that exceed the capacity of the community room. Use of the space for local charitable, educational, or cultural organizations on a sporadic basis may be considered in the future.

Financial Plan – As the accompanying facility financing plan shows, the additional cost associated with Alternative 4 can be accommodated within the tax-levy supported debt allowance of 3% of general fund revenue. The plan includes the additional expense related to Alternative 4, the Public Services Building at 500 Dedham Avenue which is currently under design, a \$20 million dollar placeholder for renovation of the Newman School, and a contingency for the unexpected. In this analysis, we recommend the reconfiguration of several projects, and the conversion of some projects from borrowing to cash capital. (This has been made possible by changes in free cash assumptions in the past year.) Moreover, by its very nature as a five year plan, the CIP allows for greater capacity in the "out years" – in this case, beginning in FY2013. Finally, the plan provides for \$4 million in funding for a Senior Center project. The timing of the financing plan would allow for a Town Meeting vote on design funds for the as yet undetermined Senior Center project as early as November, 2009.

The past year has been characterized by an amazingly transparent public process with an engaged community. It is clear that the community supports a renovation of the Town Hall. I believe that Alternative 4 is a long-term solution that will accommodate changing needs of the Town government for at least the next fifty years.